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Case Conferencing Decreases Occupational Stress for VRS Interpreters: A Qualitative Study

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Case Conferencing Decreases Occupational Stress for VRS Interpreters:

A Qualitative Study

by

Carrie L. Wilbert

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of

St. Cloud State University

in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree

Master of Science in

Counseling Psychology: Rehabilitation and Addiction Counseling

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Abstract

Many sign language interpreters working within Video Relay Services (VRS) experience more occupational stress than interpreters working in community settings (Dean, Pollard, & Samar, 2010). There exists a lack of research to guide the field of sign language interpreting in coping strategies that can be used to decrease the stress and burnout that is endemic to working in VRS. This qualitative research case study explores how case conferencing can be strategic in mitigating stress and increasing retention in the field. Case conferencing combined with Dean and Pollard's Demand Control Schema is a relatively recent approach for critical thinking and ethical decision making in the field of sign language interpreting. This researcher found that case conferencing can be a useful vehicle for ameliorating the stressful effects of working in VRS. Focus groups were conducted with VRS interpreters who participated in case conferencing workshops that were facilitated by the researcher between 2013 and 2017. Themes of effectively reducing stress, application of skills, integration of practice, increased retention and a more positive professional community were derived from the participants in the focus groups. The elements of validation and empathy combined with a group format for case conferencing could be used to increase VRS' interpreters' self-efficacy. Case conferencing, in turn, may result in improved access for consumers who are deaf and hard of hearing who utilize telecommunication services.

Keywords: sign language interpreters, VRS, case conferencing, occupational stress, qualitative study, demand control schema, deaf and hard of hearing

Acknowledgements

“The curious paradox is that when I accept myself just as I am, then I can change.”
(Rogers, 1995, p. 17)

“Being listened to by someone who understands makes it possible for persons to listen more accurately to themselves, with greater empathy toward their own visceral experiencing, their own vaguely felt meaning.” (Rogers, 1961, p. 159)

Each person travels along their own journey which includes a necessary combination of challenges to overcome and the people who assist them in that process. In my own journey, some of the most influential folks include the members of the *Minnesota Deaf Community*. These individuals are each of the Deaf consumers, Interpreters, Students, Educators, and other professionals who strive to be allies with people who are Deaf and those who have a hearing loss. I am honored to have shared in your journeys. I thank you. Each of you, in unique ways, have assisted in my professional development and can share in the accomplishment of this thesis.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

American Sign Language Interpreters (SLI) who work in the field of Video Relay Service (VRS) are often highly skilled professionals who experience an abnormally high rate of occupational stress in contrast to interpreters who work in community settings (Bower, 2015; Dean, Pollard, & Samar, 2010; Schwenke, 2015; Wessling & Shaw, 2014). The nature of interpreting virtually in a call center imposes different types of demands than working in a community setting where interpreters have access to the full repertoire of visual and auditory information that they need to interpret competently. The increased stress and burnout that VRS interpreters experience has been documented for some time through national (Bower, 2015; Dean et al., 2010), and international surveys (Napier, Skinner, & Turner, 2017). Still, the field has yet to address this pressing issue. Currently, only limited options are available for VRS interpreters in coping with these stressors that often include a voluntary reduction in the hours worked within VRS or withdrawal from the field (Bower, 2015). With the continuing need for more sign language interpreters (Bureau for Labor Statistics, 2017), these choices may result in less access to experienced interpreters for deaf and hard of hearing consumers who use VRS.

VRS is a federally funded interpreting service that provides video access to live interpreters who interpret phone calls for consumers who are deaf and hard of hearing (Moloney, 2016).

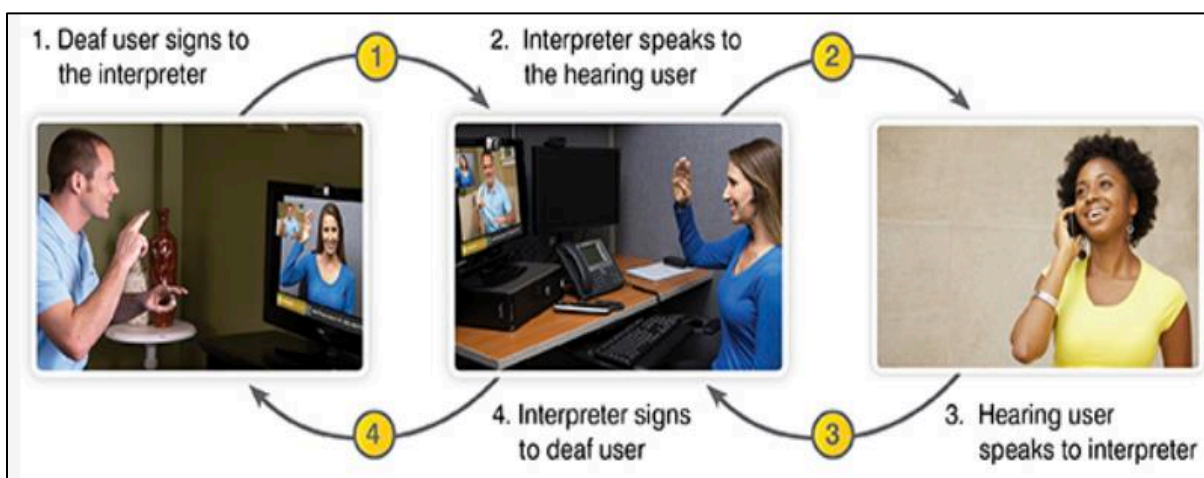


Figure 1. Video relay service. Figure depicts how the consumer who is deaf or hard of hearing (on left) communicates with a sign language interpreter through a webcam (middle) to a person who is hearing (on right) (Courtesy of Sorenson Communications, 2017).

VRS is regulated by the Federal Communication Commission (FCC) who provides reimbursement to companies who employ sign language interpreters (Moloney, 2016).

Consumers use VRS for a myriad of purposes including being able to communicate with healthcare providers, friends and family, and to connect with 911 emergency services. As a free service, VRS is unique in the interpreting field. Outside of VRS, payment for interpreters is generally the responsibility of the specific entity who is providing the service (ADA, 1990; Maxfield, 2004). The Americans with Disabilities Act (1990) and subsequent amendments require that organizations such as hospitals, schools, employers, governmental offices, or private businesses offer accommodations that consumers need to access their services. Due to VRS being a government-sponsored service, the FCC is the government agency that creates and enforces regulations for provision of VRS services and reimbursement rates (Moloney, 2016). Generally, these regulations are designed to maximize the autonomy for the deaf and hard of hearing consumer and include guidelines on how quickly calls need to be answered as well as restrictions on when calls are allowed to be transferred to another interpreter (Moloney, 2016).

The FCC regulations have been linked with a steadily decreasing reimbursement rate to providers since the inception of VRS in 2000. The FCC references the need to align rates with actual costs to assist in decreasing the “waste, fraud, [and] abuse” that has plagued the VRS program (Moloney, 2016). This declining reimbursement rate has led to VRS company policies that maximize their profits in a way that may decrease SLIs autonomy in their decision-making ability. These company policies may result in increased stress and burnout for VRS interpreters (Dean et al., 2010).

Wessling and Shaw (2014), propose the difficulty for VRS interpreters is in part due to the “emotional extremes” that they encounter in their daily work. Unlike community interpreting, in which interpreters can elect to accept job assignments where they are familiar with the content of the assignment and the consumer’s preferences, VRS interpreters work in a call center environment where they are not given the option to decline calls (Bower, 2015; Wessling & Shaw, 2014). These interpreters perform a dizzying array of skills that include innumerable language code switches between ASL and English; language register shifts to accommodate the variety of consumers and types of calls they interpret; and work under the rapid pressure of taking one call after another with little recovery time. VRS interpreters are tasked with adjusting to rapid changes in topics, consumers and varying degrees of emotion (Wessling & Shaw, 2014).

It has been my experience as a sign language interpreter with 25+ years of experience, 11 of which have included practicing in VRS, that part of what increases the stress in the VRS setting lies in the lack of context. In VRS, the general experience of an interpreter is that she answers and processes phone calls without the benefit of knowing the topic, purpose, or emotional content of the call. Unlike the community interpreter, she does not have the ability of turning down a call (Bower, 2015; Wessling & Shaw, 2014). Anecdotally, it is commonly known

in the field, that unlike most community assignments, the VRS interpreter is not privy to the identity of the consumers nor does she know where the calls will originate from. The VRS interpreter might be interpreting for people in a work setting, a healthcare environment, someone's home or the numerous other settings from which an individual may place a phone call. The VRS interpreter does not have the contextual and affective information she would have if she had driven to the emergency room of a hospital or to a building that has the name of the business located on the outside. Instead, the VRS interpreter arrives to work in a busy call center that requires a key or a code to enter. She puts away her personal items, finds an empty work station and logs into the technology that connects her virtually to clients. She wears a headset to interpret for the audio portion of the call and looks into a webcam and computer monitor for the video portion. She answers calls that come in rapidly, back-to-back, with little to no recovery time between them. Her shift will generally include some calls that are less emotionally extreme as well as others that may leave her feeling drained when she clocks off.

A VRS interpreter's work includes a number of calls that may run the gamut of emotional extremes (Wessling & Shaw, 2014). The following is offered as an example of the typical spectrum of calls that a VRS interpreter receives in their shift. The shift begins with a short 3-minute call where the goal is to order food for takeout. The interpreter orders Asian food routinely and feels good that she was able to understand the caller's order without having to ask for repetition. Her next call is a 20-minute interview for a machinist's position. She has not met the consumer, knows little regarding the mechanical work required of the position, and is unfamiliar with the caller's education or work history. She feels badly as she knows she could have more accurately interpreted the call if she had been able to access a job description and read the resume before the interview began. Next, she has 6 seconds to push aside her thoughts of

how inequitable the interviewing process was for the Deaf consumer before her next call. The ensuing call produces a strong emotional response from her as she relays the joyful news of the birth of a baby. The interpreter miscarried a child last year. She has not been able to conceive again. Unconsciously, she compartmentalizes her feelings regarding this call and finds herself impatient and frustrated for the remaining hours of her shift. Afterwards, she clocks out and wonders why she isn't looking forward to getting together with her partner's friends that evening.

Interpreters working in VRS report that one of the reasons that they experience more stress and burnout is due in part because they do not have access to the same information that is afforded the interpreter working in a community setting (Bower, 2015; Wessling & Shaw, 2014). VRS interpreters are unable to prepare for work in the same ways that would generally be available for community assignments. The community interpreter arrives at their assignment and sees the name of the business on the side of the building. They are ushered into a meeting room where they are introduced to the consumer who is deaf or hard of hearing and to the other employees who are hearing. They are able to glean impressions regarding the content of the meeting from audiovisuals such as power point presentations and handouts. They can recognize hierarchical power differentials among the participants that may assist in understanding and accurately interpreting. This additional information is unavailable to interpreters working in the VRS setting. This lack of context, in part, produces higher levels of occupational stress due to having fewer options to manage the interpreting challenges that occur (Bower, 2015; Wessling & Shaw, 2014). Additionally, companies that provide VRS services provide little support or guidelines to assist their employees in managing the occupational stress and processing the

potentially traumatic emotional material that they encounter frequently working in VRS (Wessling & Shaw, 2014).

SLIs who work in the community often have more autonomy to exercise different options or controls (Bower, 2015; Wessling & Shaw, 2014), that they use to decrease their occupational stress than interpreters employed in the VRS field. These options include limiting the breadth of their work by specializing in one area such as the medical, legal or educational settings; limiting the language range of the consumers they work with; and varying the types of assignments they are willing to accept. The VRS interpreter does not have the option to limit the type of calls they accept, the settings of those calls, nor the consumers that they work with (Bower, 2015).

VRS interpreters perform their work without the customary and usual expectations that interpreters in other fields depend upon for effective interpretation: preparation before an assignment; the ability to decide if they are a good match for the language and content; and the ability to choose work based on consumer preference (Wessling & Shaw, 2014). These professionals ostensibly have the same goal that every interpreter has, regardless of the setting they work within. That goal is to bridge the communication gap that exists between people who are deaf and use American Sign Language (ASL) and hearing people who use spoken English. In VRS, the usual strategies are diminished, and the amount and severity of occupational stress is increased.

Napier, Skinner, and Turner (2017), succinctly summarize the ambivalent feelings that many interpreters experience while working in VRS in their article entitled, “It’s good for them [consumers] but not so good for me [interpreters]....” VRS interpreters acknowledge the benefits of the system for the consumer who is deaf or hard and hearing and needs access to work, family and social systems. At the same time, interpreters continue to struggle with how to

competently provide interpreting services in the VRS setting. The combination of working in a system that was designed to provide reimbursement based upon billable minutes and the decrease of autonomy in ethical decision-making, tends to increase the occupational stress of the VRS interpreter.

VRS was begun in the late 1990s with the advent of the Americans with Disabilities Act and is regulated by the FCC (ADA, 1990; FCC, 2017). The FCC defines the interpreter as a communication assistant (CA) with the goal to provide functional equivalency for telephone use for people who are deaf and hard of hearing (FCC, 2017). A CA is the same label that the FCC uses for people who handle other types of relay calls, such as those where a consumer types out their message and the CA speaks what has been typed to the audio caller. A CA working in this capacity does not need to know American Sign Language and does not interpret the messages. Alley (2014) suggests that interpreters may have inadvertently limited their own flexibility in interpreting in VRS due to misperceptions of the CA role. This limited role of the CA may have also inadvertently influenced the VRS industry to focus on how to more efficiently operate call centers instead of exploring how interpreting is different than typing and reading textual information. In doing so, VRS companies have neglected to explore strategies to combat the unique challenges faced by interpreters working in these settings. It has been anecdotally known that when SLIs approach their employers with their difficulties, companies have tended to focus more on the individual interpreter as the cause of the issue and less on the systemic practices that may be at odds with current interpreting practice.

VRS interpreters' occupational stress has been researched mostly through the use of self-reported surveys (Bower, 2015; Dean et al., 2010; Wessling & Shaw, 2014). Dean et al.'s (2010) research found that when surveying interpreters regarding their occupational stress, almost

“identical” results were produced when it was repeated 4 years later. Interpreters practicing in the VRS setting, stated that they experience an abnormally high rate of occupational stress and burnout compared to rates reported by interpreters who work in community settings. These virtually “identical” results validate the findings of abnormally high rates of occupational stress (Dean et al., 2010). Bower (2015), in her survey of occupational stress of VRS interpreters, found that VRS interpreters continued to report high levels of stress. Bower (2015) offered some recommendation for mitigating the occupational stress which included changes in company policies so that interpreters have more recovery time in between calls and more education and training for consumers using the service. Other recommendations focused on support for SLIs in their ability to manage calls, such as increased opportunities to work as a team and more time in debriefing calls afterwards (Bower, 2015).

Case conferencing, a mainstay in the counseling field, has only recently been encouraged in the interpreting field. Dean and Pollard (2001; 2011), in their work on Demand Control Schema (DC-S), have encouraged the interpreting profession to advance from the historical perspective where interpreters viewed themselves as technicians to the more accurate role of practice professional. In the historical view, there was a presupposed finite list of ethical options that interpreters could use to navigate their complex work. Though it never seemed to reveal itself as simplistic in practice, many viewed that there was a right way and a wrong way to approach ethical reasoning. Students and professionals would often allude to the “interpreting police” who would know if they were not adhering to the proscribed rules. The perspective promoted by Dean and Pollard (2011), views the interpreter through the lens of a practice professional. As a practice professional, interpreters use critical thinking skills to make ethical decisions. By evaluating the possible consequences of each decision, versus choosing from a

finite list of right and wrong behaviors, ethical decision making is improved. Case conferencing is one way that interpreters can learn the necessary critical thinking skills and apply DC-S to improve their ethical reasoning.

Dean and Pollard (2011) view ethical reasoning more broadly than ethical issues. They describe it as the “moment-to-moment decision making” that is integral to being an ethical practitioner. Historically, interpreter training has not included much attention on the process of critical thinking. With the advent of DC-S (Dean & Pollard, 2001, 2011) and more recently case conferencing (Curtis, 2017), the interpreting field has a strategy that interpreters can learn critical thinking skills and improve their ethical decision making.

Supervision or case conferencing groups are an integral part of the ethical reflexivity that other practice professionals naturally engage in (Dean & Pollard, 2011). Being recently introduced to the interpreting field (Curtis, 2017), case conferencing provides a setting for interpreters to practice their critical thinking skills. Interpreters can discuss their cases and receive feedback about the choices they have made and the consequences of those choices. Case conferencing groups tend to follow the lead of the format that the group facilitator uses. Case conferencing may occur between two interpreters who debrief after a VRS call, it may be a group who meets to discuss their work in a general fashion, or it may be a group facilitated discussion that incorporates the structure of DC-S (Curtis, 2017). This researcher has facilitated case conferencing groups using DC-S with interpreters who work in healthcare, K-12 educational settings and VRS since 2013. The majority of the facilitated groups have been conducted with interpreters who work in VRS.

This researcher worked with approximately 45 VRS interpreters from 2013-2017. Groups of 3-8 interpreters who work in one VRS company were facilitated in case conferencing sessions

that spanned 2 months in four, 2-hour sessions. To earn continuing education units (CEUs) for the groups, participants committed to attending all four sessions and were willing to present their own individual case in which they shared the struggles they encountered in their day-to-day decision making and ethical dilemmas. This researcher found engaging interpreters in the process of case conferencing seemed to lead to a decrease in their occupational stress. This was surprising. The interpreting field, in general, has not always rewarded sharing one's challenges or being open to discuss one's decision making with colleagues. What is more common is that interpreters who reveal that they have made decisions outside of the commonly accepted range of options are met with judgment, negative comments and ostracism by other interpreters. It was not easy to convince interpreters that reflecting upon their ethical decision making in a group setting could be a positive practice to engage in.

Creating a safe space so that interpreting practitioners would feel confident to share their professional struggles meant that ground rules and structure was needed for the groups. Following the tenets of the NAD-RID Code of Professional Conduct (NAD-RID, 2005) which require confidentiality and respect for consumers was the primary consideration. Next to ethical considerations, the safe space included setting ground rules which included limiting the amount of advice giving. Other guidelines promoted discussing the cases in a professional manner and combined encouragement and empathy when listening to fellow group members.

Research Questions

The research questions grew out of the anecdotal responses received from participants in the case conferencing groups I facilitated from 2013-2017. Occupational stress has been documented in the literature as endemic to those interpreters working in VRS and is a frequent topic of conversation among those who practice in VRS. Though occupational stress has been

reported to be higher for those who interpret in VRS call centers, the interpreting field has not provided much assistance to address this issue. I wondered if case conferencing might be a method the field could use to reduce stress and increase retention in VRS.

As this would be an initial exploratory study, I used a qualitative case study method so that there would be more flexibility in the data gathering methods. I was interested in exploring what participants from the previously held case conferencing groups would share about their occupational stress and how participating in the groups may have assisted them in managing their stress. I also decided to explore the additional question of retention to understand if participants thought that case conferencing might be helpful in retaining interpreters in VRS. The research questions became, does participation in case conferencing groups assist interpreters, working in VRS, to reduce their occupational stress? And would participation in case conferencing groups lead to increased retention for interpreting in VRS?

Operationalization of Terms

Case conferencing. Defined as interpreters who participated in workshops that taught critical thinking skills based on Dean and Pollard's, 2011 Demand Control Schema. These case conferencing groups were facilitated by Carrie L. Wilbert from 2013-2017 for interpreters working in one nationally based VRS company.

Occupational stress. Self-reported symptoms of psychological distress by interpreters who participated in case conferencing. These symptoms may have included feelings of anger and frustration, a desire to decrease hours working in Video Relay Service, and or a desire to withdraw from working in Video Relay Service.

Video relay services. A free government-sponsored service designed to provide virtual access to telecommunications through the use of videophones. The sign language interpreter and

the Deaf consumer can see each other on webcams. The consumer who is hearing listens to the interpreter on their phone. The interpreter provides interpreting services so that consumers who are deaf and hard of hearing are able to initiate and receive phone calls from those who don't use sign language.

Video relay service interpreters. Interpreters who are employed in call centers to interpret video phone calls between people who are deaf and hard of hearing and people who do not use sign language.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

Interpreting is a relatively new field, and there is a lack of published research studies regarding how sign language interpreters engage in critical thinking and ethical decision making. The majority of available research stems from Dean and Pollard's (2011, 2001) work on Demand Control Schema (DC-S). Dean and Pollard (2001) began publishing their work in ethical decision making in 2001. They have promoted the view that interpreters are practice professionals who need to engage in reflective practice similar to how other practice professions promote ethical decision making, such as in the fields of nursing and counseling. Though it is sparse, the available literature identifies that sign language interpreters routinely experience occupational stress and are at risk for burnout, especially within the field of Video Relay Services (VRS) interpreting (Bower, 2015; Dean et al., 2010; Wessling & Shaw, 2014). Unfortunately, the literature also shows that the challenges of occupational stress are not currently being addressed in the field (Bower, 2015; Dean et al., 2010; Wessling & Shaw, 2014). As the need for interpreting services continues to rise, there is an increasing onus to identify and provide proven strategies that can be used to decrease occupational stress so that VRS interpreters can continue to provide access to the phone for consumers who are deaf and hard of hearing. Experienced VRS interpreters need to be encouraged to remain in VRS so that deaf and hard of hearing consumers may receive the best access to interpreting services via video technology.

Supervision

Since its introduction in 2001, Dean, a premiere practitioner and theorist in the field, has promoted the critical thinking process of DC-S that can lead to improved ethical decision making

(Dean & Pollard, 2001, 2011). Ethical reasoning is defined more broadly as the “moment-to-moment” decisions that interpreters engage in as part of their regular work. Dean believes that interpreters need to understand how to incorporate a process such as DC-S so that they can use better critical thinking skills to understand the interplay of challenges they encounter and the options they can use to respond. Dean has worked for almost three decades to convince the interpreting profession that ethical decision making should be mandated for interpreters for them to state that they provide ethically competent interpreting (Dean & Pollard, 2001, 2011). She has promoted both the advancement of the practice professional construct as well as supervision or case conferencing as a way to obtain it (Dean & Pollard, 2001, 2011).

Hetherington (2012), also an advanced practitioner in sign language interpreting, promotes the idea that the consequences of the psychological, emotional, and occupational stress that can plague a Sign Language Interpreter (SLI) can be mediated with consultative supervision. She reiterates Dean and Pollard's (2001, 2011) premise that supervision is a mainstay for the practicing professional and that it has been neglected in Interpreter Education Programs (IEP's). The counseling profession has long utilized supervision as the way for counselors to maintain empathy with consumers while ameliorating the effects of compassion fatigue. Part of the occupational stress that interpreters experience is the inherent difficulty that comes in interpreting emotionally charged and traumatic material. Hetherington (2012) conducted a qualitative study in the UK to ascertain how consultative supervision might be a helpful method for interpreters to cope with their occupational stress. Having experienced supervision herself, she was interested in exploring how it might be utilized in the field. She performed a qualitative study where she interviewed other sign language interpreters who also found that supervision enhanced the quality of their work.

In an insightful short article, Harvey (2003), an experienced counselor in the field of counseling clients who are deaf and hard of hearing, describes how interpreters can benefit from the insight that counseling brings. Harvey states that interpreters may be blind to their emotional triggers (2003). Well known in the counseling profession as countertransference, these triggers may unconsciously influence an interpreter's internal responses in their interpreting assignments. His research finds that compassion fatigue is common among interpreters and suggests that one of the "perils of empathy" is that interpreters may unknowingly project their issues onto their consumers.

Increased Stress

Wessling and Shaw (2014), describe the challenges inherent within the design of VRS interpreting. There is the challenge of interpreting in a language that utilizes a three-dimensional space in a two-dimensional virtual environment. The structure of VRS imposes limitations on the interpreter's ability to match call content with their professional experience. Additionally, they note that the interpreter is exposed to a multitude of "emotional extremes" during a shift which increases their risk of occupational stress and burnout.

Bower (2015) surveyed 424 VRS interpreters and asked them to rate 20 separate factors measuring their stress levels. The top five stressors were identified as: 1) managing calls in which a caller is angry with you; 2) concern about the length of time between calls; 3) receiving a 911 call; 4) concern about the physical strain; and 5) interpreting calls with limited contextual information. Participants identified burnout as more prevalent in VRS versus in other work settings. 60% of the respondents stated that they currently were experiencing symptoms of burnout, and 7% had left VRS due to burnout. In addition, a subcategory indicated that 22% were either "taking a break from VRS due to burnout or had reduced their hours." With the

shortage of sign language interpreters, burnout is described as a real issue that needs to be addressed (Dean & Pollard, 2001, 2011; Napier et al., 2017; Schwenke, 2015).

An international survey of interpreters also validates the stress that interpreters experience. Napier et al., (2017), surveyed sign language interpreters in the European Union who work in the field of VRS and Video Remote Interpreting. In this first survey of VRS interpreters outside of the US, they found that interpreters reported feeling that they were able to provide reasonably effective interpreting access for consumers who are deaf and hard of hearing. However, they also reported that they continue to struggle with significant challenges in coping with the technology. As is a typical experience with any equipment that depends on the internet, interpreters find video relay to be a double-edged sword. VRS provides an advantage to consumers in that it allows increased access to interpreters. Consumers can make video phone calls from the comfort of their homes instead of having to travel to the organization, facility or family member's home to communicate. VRS provides savings regarding time and cost, as interpreters can be reached almost instantly instead of having to schedule the interpreter days in advance. The downside of the technology was that interpreters also felt that VRS concomitantly reduced the ability of the interpreter to prepare for the content of the call due to not being able to gather the usual contextual and affective information that they could in an on-site appointment (Napier et al., 2017).

The available literature regarding interpreters who work in the VRS setting provides support for the supposition that VRS interpreters routinely experience an abnormally high level of occupational stress and are at risk for burnout. Unfortunately, it also demonstrates that as a whole, the field has not addressed occupational stress for VRS interpreters. This research study seeks to add to the literature to understand if participating in a case conferencing group might be

useful in aiding VRS interpreters in decreasing their occupational stress and increasing their retention in the VRS setting.

Chapter 3: Method

This exploratory case study used a qualitative approach to better understand the experience of VRS interpreters who participated in a series of case conferencing groups. The participants were drawn from a pool of interpreters who worked within one Video Relay Services (VRS) company. Each research participant had previously participated in one 4-session series of case conferencing workshops that were facilitated by this researcher.

A qualitative approach was chosen as the best method to answer the research questions and to understand how case conferencing might be used to decrease the higher rates of occupational stress experienced by interpreters in VRS given the need to build theory in this area of research. Purposive sampling was necessary as the goal was to research what a specific group of professional VRS interpreters felt they had gained by being in a case conferencing workshop facilitated by this researcher. A grounded theory approach was chosen over a phenomenological approach as the goal was not only to understand the phenomena of case conferencing, as applied to sign language interpreters working in the VRS setting, but also to explore whether it could be used as a strategy that to decrease the occupational stress of these professionals.

Background Information

To provide context for this qualitative study, it is helpful to understand the background of the researcher. She is a certified sign language interpreter with more than 25 years of experience interpreting in the community and VRS. She is community trained by Deaf, DeafBlind and hard of hearing consumers, and has been active in the field as a mentor, workshop presenter, and ethical decision-making (EDM) coach. The last 11 years have seen a shift in her work, where she concentrated on actively incorporating an ethical decision-making structure into her assignments. She was trained in how to facilitate case conferencing groups by Karen Malcolm who is an

interpreter educator in Canada and the US. Ms. Malcolm provided the facilitator training through the Collaborative for the Advancement of Teaching Excellence (CATIE Center) which is located on the campus of St. Catherine University. The CATIE Center is one of the regional centers in the National Consortium of Interpreter Education Centers (NCIEC) that receives support from the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) for sign language interpreter training. This researcher progressed in her facilitation skills and was asked to assist Ms. Malcolm in training the second group of facilitators for the CATIE Center.

This researcher has found that in facilitating case conferencing groups, most interpreters comfortably adhere to the ethical guidelines of the NAD-RID (National Association of the Deaf-Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf, n.d.) Code of Professional Conduct (CPC) (NAD-RID, 2005). Confidentiality is the foundation upon which trust is built in an interpreted interaction. Just as essential to following the CPC is the need to create a space where both new and experienced interpreters can feel safe in sharing their ethical decision making. This space needs to be a setting in which they do not feel judged but where they can critically analyze their work in a validating manner. Many interpreters may be reluctant to participate in such groups due to adverse or shaming comments they have received from their colleagues. It is an unfortunate dynamic in the interpreting profession that Emily Ott (2012) has coined as "horizontal violence." Ms. Ott defines this experience "as persistent behaviors such as gossip, diminishing comments, rudeness, devaluating others' professional worth, and criticism, perpetrated by members of a group toward one another, whether consistently or inconsistently, that cause harm, anxiety, and stress in the receiver" (Ott, 2012, p. 15). Due to these negative behaviors that many interpreters have experienced, ground rules were set to provide a safe space. These ground rules emphasized confidentiality, validation, and empathy for others, as well as a nonjudgmental approach to group

discussion. Each of these guidelines were vital in creating a space where members would feel safe to share their struggles and challenging cases.

For 5 years, the researcher has worked to hone her skills in facilitating case conferencing groups. She began by working with a talented and progressive group of interpreters who practiced in the medical and mental health fields. They each desired to improve the ethical decision making in their practice and were willing to learn along with the researcher to discover how case conferencing might be used to improve their ethical decision-making skills. Later, the researcher expanded her focus to include interpreters working in the educational arena and finally into VRS. Working with VRS interpreters became the predominant area of her case conferencing practice due, in no small part, to the resources provided by the VRS company she was employed by. The VRS company provided a conference room, supplies, and compensation for the researcher to provide free workshops for interpreters who worked in the company. The company also provided for an assistant facilitator who assisted in managing the groups and processing the paperwork for Continuing Education Units (CEUs).

Currently, the researcher is completing her master's degree in rehabilitation and addiction counseling to become better versed in how to advocate for societal change for people with disabilities (PWD) that focuses on breaking down barriers while assisting consumers to achieve their personal goals.

Workshop format. The researcher conducted case conferencing workshops for sign language interpreters working in VRS from 2013-2017. The workshop format was four sessions for a total of 8.5 hours with 3-8 interpreters committed to participating in all group sessions. Each interpreter earned professional studies, RID CEUs, for their participation. The stated goal of the groups was for each participant to analyze their decision-making process by using Dean

and Pollard's Demand Control Schema (DC-S). Workshop members presented an ethical dilemma they experienced and then worked together with group members to discover the primary challenge (demand) the options (controls) to resolve the challenge. Consequences for each decision were evaluated, and different options were then considered.

In order to establish a guide for group members to analyze their work, the researcher reviewed the core concepts of Dean and Pollard's (DC-S) (2011) during the first session. Before participants were asked to present their cases, the research presented an ethical dilemma of her own, as a method to model vulnerability and to emphasize group interactions in a safe space.

The participants presented their case and proceeded to work with group members to identify the ethical challenges (demands), options the interpreter chose to resolve the challenge (controls), and outcomes (consequences) that occurred as a result of the choices the interpreter employed. The decisional latitude continuum, of possible controls, was presented interactively. Group members were asked to stand on an imaginary line that replicated the continuum with conservative controls at the one end and liberal controls at the other. This exercise was reported by interpreters to have assisted them in more rapidly learning how to identify the differences in the controls they used.

Data Collection

The case study used a qualitative approach as the researcher was interested in exploring the experience of the interpreters who had participated in the VRS case conferencing groups. The study consisted of three focus groups. Two of the focus groups had three participants in each group, and one focus group had two participants in the group, for a total of eight participants. Each group was audio recorded with a micro-recording device. The researcher typed in word for word for each focus group what was recorded from the micro recorder audio recordings. She

used these word documents as verbatim transcripts of each focus group. The researcher removed the names and other identifying information from each transcript that was present in the audio recordings. All three verbatim transcripts, and the code sheet, were stored on a password-protected computer. The code sheet was the only form whereby a participant was identified. Only the researcher and the researcher's advisor were privy to the code sheet. The audio recordings, the code sheet, and the transcripts were locked in the advisor's file cabinet at the completion of the research. They will be held for up to 3 years.

Institutional Review Board Approval

Informed consent. Approval from St. Cloud State University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) was obtained prior to the beginning of this project. The IRB consent form consisted of an explanation of the process of confidentiality for the focus groups participants, the voluntary nature of the participation, the ability to withdraw from participation in the research without penalty, and the purpose of the research. The researcher's advisor's contact information was also included. The confidentiality of each participant was protected so that no one was named in the transcription of the audiotaped focus groups nor the writing of the results. All information was stored on a password-protected computer. Participation was voluntary, and each participant was free to withdraw from participation at any time. There was no compensation awarded to anyone who participated in this research project. No harm was expected to occur as a result of participating in this study.

Recruitment procedure. An email invitation was sent to VRS interpreters who had previously participated in one of the VRS case conferencing sessions that were facilitated by the researcher from 2013-2017. Email addresses that participants had used to register for the case conferencing session(s) were used to send to invite interpreters to participate in this case study.

The email invitation included a copy of the IRB approved informed consent form. Follow up emails were resent to individuals who did not respond. Confirmation emails with the date, time and location of the focus group were sent to each participant who indicated they wanted to participate. Forty-five invitations were emailed. Almost half or twenty-three email addresses were still viable. Of these, 52% (12) of the individuals responded and 39% (9) confirmed. These nine were placed into one of the three focus groups.

Demographic information. Demographic information was collected from each participant to contextualize the makeup of the participants. The demographic form was separate from the informed consent and did not include the names of the participants. The demographic form included questions regarding the number of years the interpreter had been working in VRS, whether the interpreter was certified and what type of certification they held. Questions were also asked for each participant to self-identify their race, disability status, sexual orientation, and age.

The eight participants in the case study self-reported their answers to the demographic questions (see Table 1).

Table 1

Participant Demographic Information

Age (years)	18-30	31-40	41-50	51-60
	1	2	4	1
Gender	Male	Female	Prefer not to answer	
	0	7	1	
Education (major not requested)	2-year degree	Bachelors	Master's	
	3	3	2	
Disability	Yes	No		
		8		
Years of experience in interpreting	6-10	11-20	21+	
	2	3	3	
Certification	RID (CSC, CI, CT, NIC)	RID & NAD		
	5	3		
VRS work categorized (could check more than one)	Part-time	Full-time	Mostly other than VRS	Mostly VRS
	2	2	4	2
Race	European American (white)	Other		
	7	1		
Sexuality	Heterosexual	Other		
	8	0		

Focus Groups

The email invitation included a copy of the IRB approval, purpose of the study and the informed consent form. Participants signed the informed consent form and returned them to the facilitator at the start of the focus groups. Each focus group confirmed three participants. One focus group was limited to two participants as the third member had to cancel immediately before the workshop, and it was not possible to find a replacement. This small size was ideal in that it allowed each participant the opportunity to share their thoughts entirely and at the same time was large enough size to generate a robust discussion of the questions.

Participants. Eight participants who had previously participated in a VRS case conferencing workshop led by the first author participated in this study. The workshop format had been constructed so that the workshop participants met for four 2-hour sessions spread over a period of 6 to 8 weeks. The total pool of interpreters who had participated in the researcher's VRS case conferencing groups was approximately 150. Of that total, approximately 60 interpreters were located in one mid-western state.

In 2017, a different, condensed version of the case conferencing workshop lasting 2-days was offered. The 2-day format was not ideal as it did not allow time in between sessions for participants to apply what they had previously learned. The 2-day format was required due to the travel expense for the researcher to conduct the workshop in six states. Due to the change in format, the researcher decided to recruit only those who had participated in the 4-session groups. Email addresses that had been used to register for the groups were used to invite participants for the focus groups. Of these 45 addresses, only 23 emails were still active. Nine interpreters responded and were placed into three different groups. One participant canceled, which left eight participants who completed the focus groups.

Demographic information was requested of the 8 case study participants. (Please see Table 1.) The eight participants ranged in age from 18-60 years. Seven identified as female, and one preferred not to answer. Each had degrees though the type of degree was not requested and therefore may not have been a degree in interpreting. Three participants had a 2-year degree, three participants had a bachelor's degree and two had a master's degree. All participants were nationally certified with five holding the RID (Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf) certification (CSC, CI, CT or NIC) and three holding both the RID and the NAD (National Association of the Deaf) certifications. Participants described their work experience in VRS as part time (2); full

time (2); mostly other than VRS (4) and mostly VRS (2). (There are more than 8 responses as more than one box could be checked.) For identification of race, European American (White) was selected by 7 participants and Other was selected by one participant. For the final category of sexuality, all 8 participants identified as heterosexual.

Facilitator. A facilitator was chosen to lead the focus groups instead of the researcher since the researcher was also the facilitator of the workshop the participants were asked to discuss. The use of a facilitator was utilized to decrease any bias that may have inhibited participants from freely sharing their opinion. The facilitator was selected for their expertise in facilitating focus groups of sign language interpreters and students, their reputation and expertise in the field of interpreting pedagogy, and their experiential knowledge of being a member of one of the researcher's case conferencing groups.

Format of focus groups. Three focus groups were conducted in the space of 3 weeks. The facilitator arranged for the groups to meet in a conference room at a local university. The university was known to the participants due to its reputation for providing excellent interpreting and mentoring resources. The university was located fairly centrally in the mid-western city, and no participant reported difficulty in finding the conference room. Each focus group was allowed 1.5 hours and each group completed their discussion in under an hour. Each group had three confirmed participants. One focus group had two participants who completed the focus group due to a last-minute cancellation of the third participant. Each group was audio recorded with a stand-alone micro-recording device. Each audio recording was transcribed verbatim into word documents by the researcher.

For each focus group, the facilitator introduced the concept of a "talking piece" that she has routinely used in her work. The talking piece was used for the person who was speaking.

Other group members were asked to refrain from speaking if they were not holding the talking piece. The talking piece was passed from one group member to the next in a clockwise fashion, and there were at least two rounds per question. If a person did not have a comment when it was their turn, then they could say "pass" and give the talking piece to the next individual. The talking piece for these groups was the micro-recorder.

Five questions were asked in each focus group, and the facilitator used the "guided conversation" concept that allowed her to follow up on the participant's comments. The facilitator varied her method. At times in the conversation, she used to follow up questions to glean more information from a response. At other times, she used periodic summarizing to assist members in their discussion.

Questions Asked in the Focus Groups

The facilitator asked five questions in each focus group. The questions focused on the research focus of the participants' occupational stress or retention in VRS. The purpose of being a member of a case conferencing group was for each interpreter to learn to apply critical thinking skills to their "moment-to-moment" (Dean & Pollard, 2011) decision-making process. The goal of the research question was to understand how being exposed to learning about their own decision-making process assisted in decreasing the participants' stress and retention in VRS. The five questions that were asked of each focus group were:

- 1) Describe the occupational stress you have encountered in your work as a VRS interpreter.
- 2) Give examples of how you have used case conferencing to decrease your occupational stress in VRS.

- 3) Describe how case conferencing might be used to increase interpreters' retention in VRS.
- 4) What techniques or strategies that you gained from case conferencing have you shared with your colleagues?
- 5) What other comments do you have regarding case conferencing?

Chapter 4: Findings

This qualitative study was designed to explore the research question of how participation in case conferencing groups might be effective in mitigating the effects of occupational stress for sign language interpreters who work in VRS; and if participation in these groups could increase participation in VRS? These are essential questions which have not yet been addressed by the field of sign language interpreting. Research surveys have documented the additional stress that interpreters working in VRS encounter, but little has been done to create strategies or tools that would assist interpreters in managing this stress. The researcher was interested in learning if participation in case conferencing groups might be a strategy that the field could promote for these purposes. The data yielded themes that provide support for both of these research questions. Participation in case conferencing may be effective for interpreters to use in their reducing occupational stress and increasing retention in VRS.

Using the software program, NVivo, the researcher used a constant comparative analysis of the data. The data consisted of verbatim transcripts from audio recordings that the researcher transcribed from each focus group. Each transcript was found to depict similar comments from participants who described how being involved in a case conferencing group assisted them in decreasing their occupational stress and how it might assist others increase their retention in VRS. The researcher coded the comments from the transcripts into nodes using the NVivo software. The nodes were then combined into categories. In an iterative process, the researcher used the categories to assist in developing themes from the data. Through coding and comparing the data iteratively, the researcher grouped the information into four themes plus an additional finding that seemed to fit the data best.

The four major themes of the data were:

- Effectiveness of case conferencing in reducing occupational stress.
- Application of skills gained in the groups.
- Integrated practice.
- Case conferencing as a retention tool.

Effectiveness in Reduction of Occupational Stress

This case study's interpreting participants stated that their previous participation in this researcher's case conferencing groups was effective in reducing their occupational stress from working in VRS. This reduction in stress was due to several factors: 1) Use of common terminology; 2) Validation and nonjudgmental space to analyze the work; and 3) The provision of additional tools. The stressors that participants identified were similar to the findings published in previous self-reported surveys of VRS interpreters (Brower, 2015; Napier et al., 2017; Wessling & Shaw, 2014). Everyday stressors were identified as issues with the video and audio technology; the rapid pace of calls; the extreme variety of topics; lack of recovery time; and lack of support from management. An additional stressor, which had not been reported previously in the literature, regarded how case conferencing assisted interpreters in managing their co-workers' difference in personality and working styles.

Having a common terminology was cited as helpful in identifying specific stressors. Using vocabulary from Dean and Pollard's (2011) Demand Control Schema (DC-S) allowed for an ease of discussion. Participants discussed how the workshop had assisted them in using the terminology of DC-S in which they critically analyzed the challenges (demands), identified options to resolve the challenges (controls) and weighed the outcomes (consequences) of using specific options.

Comments from the participants included:

[before]... We did not have the language needed.... (Participant #1)

Yeah, the support and ...the self-analysis you gain really analyzing ... a call to label the demands... What's making this difficult? Why? Is it interpersonal? Intrapersonal? All of those things being able to identify and name them. (Participant #6)

It finally provided an opportunity ... for professionals to come together and learn how to speak about these calls, in this case in a professional manner. Um. And it gave language for that. It provided us the opportunity to take the language we had learned in session and take it with us ... speaking in a professional manner with confidentiality as our priority. So, I felt that it really was a great opportunity for professionals to come together and continue to move our profession upwards. And it was a great environment to be able to do that. And yet, still very safe and we felt we could work through tough stuff...(Participant #7)

...I realized when I went through the case conferencing, was I didn't realize how many controls I had for demands that were already happening. (Participant #3)

Many participants identified the main stress in VRS as "It's not the interpreting, it's everything else." That "everything else" were the constant decision-making that interpreters face numerous times in each call. Until the interpreters participated in the case conferencing groups, they did not have an effective way of improving their practice because they did not have the terminology to discuss their issues. One participant stated,

Yeah, and ... what we learned ... the next day we have a way of talking about it. Or if someone is struggling, so now you can say. 'What other controls could you have used?' or 'What was the demand that was getting to you?' (Participant #8)

Focus group members reported that participation in case conferencing groups has decreased their stress because the group format provided validation for their individual challenges. They also reported that listening to other interpreters describe challenges that were similar to their experience assisted in normalizing the struggles they encountered in their regular work. The case conferencing group format was beneficial as it allowed members to critically evaluate a variety of strategies that improved their practice and reduced their occupational stress.

The group format itself, was also identified as a useful format in reducing occupational stress, validating one's experience, and gaining strategies to approach their challenges. One participant described the endemic challenges of VRS: "I'm supposed to interpret something I know nothing about, about something I can't see, to a person I've never met (Participant #5)." This statement exemplifies the pivotal challenge in VRS. Unlike community interpreting, where the interpreter generally knows whom they are interpreting for, the topic and the context of the situation, the VRS interpreter generally works in a vacuum. This lack of context for each call is often described as an additional stressor in the field of VRS interpreting. Following are participant responses.

I learned that I did my job. I did what I thought was right, or worked for me, or [what] was best at the time. But then to think about planning ahead for the next time it happened. Because it always does. It seems like every time something yukky has happened. It comes up again at some point. Maybe not tomorrow. But next week or next month. (Participant #3)

I'm just riddled with self-doubt. Constantly. What's great is that, case conferencing has really validated; just like allowed me to validate the choices that I make. And be like oh there's not like only one way. There's that whole pendulum and you can go more liberal with your choices and it doesn't mean you're a bad interpreter and you're doing it wrong or you can go more conservative and that doesn't mean that it's bad or that it's wrong. (Participant #4)

To ask questions but without judgment. ... That was really helpful too. You know, we can be critical of ourselves as interpreters. And I'm not sure why that is, but it's a common theme. We can really berate ourselves. ... When things don't go well, or we don't feel we did a good job. (Participant #8)

Like the 'unity of the body' of interpreters. During that time (of case conferencing), like you said to debrief and encourage each other and affirm each other. ... I don't feel that there are judgments... That was a wrong decision or that was a right decision. But um. I've been through that. That kind of thing. There's encouragement there. That's (what) we need. Kind of a building up of the body. (Participant #8)

The focus group discussions highlighted the importance of case conferencing as a resource for acquiring strategies to decrease occupational stress, improve outcomes with consumers, and add tools to their interpreting tool box. Participants stated they gained a variety of tools they could use to decrease their occupational stress. Some participants discussed how they learned of different strategies to engage more effectively with customers so that they could have improved outcomes in their calls. Others reflected on their experience that they were able to add more tools to their interpreting toolbox. Also, case conferencing itself was seen as a tool that could be used to work through the stress they experienced.

In any job, if you're overworked, not feeling appreciated, man. You're outta there. You're gonna go back to whatever it was you were doing before...What we do is very intense, for the most part... And if I don't have a way to let some of that go or release that I'm not going to be able to stay very long. (Participant #3)

You know, I think that it's a really valuable tool for like interpreting in general. (Participant #1)

I think that was a big thing that destresses me now. Is to be able to say to someone who has been there longer than I have. Hey, can I talk to you about a call that I just had? And feel comfortable in that without being nervous that at any moment the FCC police are going to come and drag me away (laughing). (Participant #2)

Application of Skills

The goal of continuing education is for professionals to not only learn new information but to apply the knowledge and skills and put them into practice in their work. Participants discussed the difficulty they had attempting to apply the tenets of DC-S to their work. Each participant acknowledged that they had heard of DC-S before participating in case conferencing, and most had taken part in one of Dean's workshops that introduced DC-S. However, a common theme reflected on in the focus groups was that without the structure of a case conferencing group, they were unable to apply the knowledge and soon relegated DC-S to the bookshelf of

another good workshop. One participant stated, "I didn't even know what demands and controls were before that, before I took case conferencing." Another admitted, "Honestly, I hadn't studied any of that material previously." The case conferencing groups were focused on the application of the DC-S concepts. Applying ethical decision-making theory and putting it into practice was part of the benefits participants gained from the case conferencing group.

I feel like that so many of the workshops and conferences that I attend have a lot of really cool information in theory (laughs). And you know you get ... all this cool vocabulary, but you know 3 weeks later I don't remember what that was; so how is it really improving my work as an interpreter? So, this [case conferencing] I can bring forward. I actually did this. I actually [presented] a situation I went through. If it ever happens again how can I, make it better? Or change it? Or how would somebody else have handled it? And that I could carry that into my very next shift the next day and that's something I could keep with me and keep doing on a smaller scale with people after I debrief, and it taught me something that I could actually use. (Participant #2)

Some participants described how their participation in case conferencing assisted them to rethink their practice and adjust how they approach ethical decision making in their work.

...so, I've learned to look at the demands and controls because I was more factual. I was a black and a white, a yes or a no, a good or a bad. And I learned it's not about the good and the bad but about the options. You know. Like you were saying. And oh ... you said you wouldn't have handled it that way. But they did and why. So, I've learned to look at it through different lens you know instead of so black and white. (Participant #3)

But I thought that I had fought for the Deaf person's rights and I thought that I had done the right thing and then I went to case conferencing and another interpreter shared with me their similar experience as what this deaf person was having, and it was like (laughing) ... (I) probably shouldn't have done that. (Participant #8)

Integrated Practice

Integrated practice, the third theme, was a common thread discussed throughout each of the focus groups. Case conferencing was not a professional development workshop that they attended and then relegated to some dusty corner of their mind. Participants discussed how they were able to use the terminology and the process they had gained in the case conferencing groups

to incorporate it into their work. They identified two specific ways they integrated what they had gained from their groups into their practice: 1) Casual conversations with colleagues; and in their 2) Mentoring practice.

I think it's uh, I didn't directly sit down with a co-worker, 'Well in case conferencing I learned this...' but I think it just made my conversations with my co-workers a little bit different.... (I asked them) Explain to me what happened... I'm not gonna make any judgments on you but I'm gonna give you other options. (Participant #2)

And that helped me to know how to respond to them. You know 'I commiserate with you'. 'You know it's really awful that they said that to you or I can't believe that happened. That's terrible. Let's build on that together.' Instead of my communication just fostering this um huge downer. They go on their ten-minute break and it's like, I feel terrible. It takes what was bad, and I can swing it back into how can your next call go better? And I think it taught me that ... 'Yes, It's Awful, ... Let's make it better.' (Participant #2)

...someone came to me and they were having a really difficult time with a certain type of caller and you know, and they'd been making very liberal choices with them and I talked with them. And I was like, well maybe you're going to have to swing to more like conservative choices. To get the boundaries you need with that person...all that that smart talk came from ... case conferencing. (Participant #4)

So, I feel like having been in case consult, I know what questions to ask. You know, I can kind of probe, if someone wants to vent. You know if things if you could change something you did, what would you have done differently? (Participant #6)

(my peers) ...they'll jump right to the frustration and sometimes I'll back them up and say, ok...Like it was so helpful for me to identify circumstances leading up to... 'Tell me a little more about your day?' So, I'll ask, 'Were you tired at the time? Was it the beginning of your shift? The end of your shift?' Um, 'How was the lighting?' So environmental (demands), starting there. So, it was kind of ...narrowing down. I loved that! I had never really thought that much about it before..." (Participant #7)

Was there a moment when you think you could have made a different decision that impacted the outcome of the call? You know, those kinds of questions. To help someone process a difficult experience. As opposed to saying, I understand and I'm sure it was fine. Which is all very well intended and altruistic.... I think it helps to know that there are questions to ask. (Participant #6)

I was recently talking to the person who ... (works with) spoken language interpreters in schools at the state and said to her demand control. You know this would be a really good

way for spoken language interpreters to begin talking about, instead of saying, oh I have a problem. Well here's a way to decide what your problem might be. (Participant #1)

So, I feel like having been in case consult, I know what questions to ask. You know ... if you could change something you did, what would you have done differently?... Was there a moment when you think you could have made a different decision that impacted the outcome of the call? You know, those kinds of questions. To help someone process a difficult experience. (Participant #6)

Several participants provide formal mentoring services in their work outside of VRS. The two comments below, reflect how case conferencing has assisted them in providing better services as a mentor for interpreters working towards national certification.

Being better versed in Demand Control and in Role Space helped me think that I am speaking the language of newer graduates. Um. This is what they're trained in nowadays. So, when I speak that to them at an internship site or when they're mentoring with me. That. I've learned that new language. Or honed it maybe. I knew it before but honed it. (Participant #1)

And so, I was able to turn that [case conferencing] into school mentoring as well, um which ultimately now three-fourths of our interpreters are working in video relay. So, I think you know it's spread [outside of VRS]. (Participant #3)

In addition, participants commented about how practical the application of case conferencing was to their daily work. They emphasized how they have incorporated what they had gained from the case conferencing groups into their daily practice.

I use it every single day... All the time. So, now after having practiced case conference for years. VRS and outside, in terms of a practice. It's become like a routine for how I handle demands. (Participant #4)

Cause wow it really helped me to see the deaf person's perspective was probably totally different than me. (Participant #8)

Retention

Retention of interpreters in VRS was the second question this case study sought to answer. As interpreters have reported that decreasing their hours is one of the main strategies that they use to manage their occupational stress in VRS (Bower, 2015), it was important to explore

whether case participation in case conferencing might also assist interpreters in maintaining or increasing the amount of time they worked in VRS. Retention in VRS was described by the focus group members as the inverse of a lack of incentive to improve one's practice. The policies and practices that are endemic to working in VRS maintain a focus on quick responses and strict adherence to rules that are designed to increase consumer autonomy and billable minutes. There is little focus from management on the quality of the interpreting product. Due to the inability to monitor interpreters due to the confidential nature of the interpreting work, there is also a lack of attention to the skill level of the interpreter. In community settings, interpreters are ethically required to decide prior to accepting a job if they are a good match for the setting and consumer. This ethical decision-making process is not permitted for the interpreter working in VRS. Calls are routed merely to the next available interpreter. In this milieu, it can be easy to become complacent and focus on getting through the shift instead of being mindful of the quality of one's work. An interpreter may meet all the administrative rubrics for their calls but be left with only their own individual impressions to measure if quality interpreting occurred in those same calls. The participants felt that providing case conferencing as a benefit could be used to affirm that the administration is also interested in the same goals as the interpreter in providing a quality interpreting experience for each call. Participants noted,

I think if a company would prioritize...a regular case conferencing opportunity, the employees would also feel very valued...that...would be one...of the many links that would be needed between administration and the employees...that these things are really important to us and I think that can go really far.... Especially like you said if it could be a regular event. ... I would go to case conferencing and it would be at the forefront for the next couple of weeks. I mean it would be like right there and then over time you get a little complacent and ... I think it raises the morale ... over all. (Participant #7)

So, the absence of case consult, interpreters would be stuck with their patterns you know, not be able stretch their container.” (Participant #6)

I'm not sure if this fits exactly. But complacency keeps coming to my head. In that, I think for most interpreters if you get complacent you're not going to be very effective. And I think this (case conferencing group) challenged people not to become complacent. (Participant #3)

...(VRS) it's the 'same same' (uses the ASL sign) just keep doing the same thing with no regard for improvement or professional development or professional modification changes. So, complacency, I think is the one thing that I think will help with retention as I don't think that most of us who work in interpreting ever want to become complacent. Because then, we lose our 'effectiveness.' (Participant #3)

We aren't just interpreting. We, it's a career for us. It's not a job ... while we raise the kids and then we're gonna be stay at home or whatever. Other peoples' paths that take them... I think there's definitely that dichotomy in our field where people who want to always be improving and people who don't. (Participant #1)

Retention in VRS was also described in terms of the experience of community within a center. Participants reported that due to having less stress at work, they were more effective at managing the challenges they experienced in VRS. Being able to more effectively manage their occupational stress led to increased retention. Community was the term that participants used to describe the effect of case conferencing. One person described themselves as being in the "millennial" generation and how vital connection was to their generation.

Going back to what I said earlier about the sense of community. Um. I think, my observations with my generation, in particular, are that we're looking for a sense of community. And fostering a sense of community and in the workplace in a field that is not traditionally known for a strong supportive community. Interpreters have a very black name as far as supporting one another go. But to have a little oasis... (Participant #2)

Interpreting can be a lonely and isolating experience for many interpreters and searching for the experience of community is not limited to those who would identify as millennials. Emily Ott (2012) describes the interpreting profession as similar to the nursing profession in that it is not a rare experience for interpreters to experience negative behaviors from their colleagues. Newer interpreters especially may be searching for mentors who will help usher them into this new field and instead experience behavior such as insults, snubbing, and sarcasm that Ott

describes as "horizontal violence" (2012). Engaging in presenting cases and being willing to share their struggles assisted group members to find trust in each other. Due to having increased trust with their coworkers, they were more interested in remaining in VRS to gain that community.

Additional Finding: Center Culture Changed

The development of new norms at centers where participants worked was another finding in the data identified by several participants. These participants reflected on how the process of case conferencing established new norms for the center where they worked. Previous to case conferencing, there had been many of the negative behaviors associated with Ott's "horizontal violence" (2012). Interpreters had not felt safe to dialogue with others about their challenges. The call center culture was described as being changed because of the validation and nonjudgmental nature of the groups. The "safe space" that was created in the groups extended to others in the call center and changed the dynamics of the relationships.

So, just mind-blowing how it made the work environment safer. Um, more professional, positive ... (Participant #5)

But I know that Carrie said something along the lines of, "when you're in the center now, start thinking about your calls." She made it applicable like during that time when we had case conferencing sessions going on. So, it kind of brought all that Demand control... ethical decision making... into a semi-controlled environment, meaning that we're all the same kind of people working together and seeing the improvement. (Participant #5)

Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusions

Discussion

This master's thesis research project used a qualitative case study method to explore the research questions of whether case conferencing might be an effective medium for decreasing the occupational stress of interpreters working in video relay service (VRS) and increase their retention in the field. As there is a continuing need for highly skilled American Sign Language (ASL) interpreters to work in VRS, a setting that has been reported to have an exceptionally severe level of occupational stress and burnout, there is a need to develop strategies that interpreters can use to manage the stress that they experience. The data for the study were compiled from a case study of three focus groups of participants who had previously engaged in the researcher's case conferencing workshops. Four major themes were drawn from analysis of the transcripts of the audiotaped focus groups. These themes provide support for the research questions. Specifically, participation in case conferencing groups was perceived as: effective in decreasing occupational stress in VRS; assisted in the application of learned skills; was integrated into practice; and assisted in retention. An additional finding suggests that the practice of case conferencing groups can positively influence the culture of a call center by decreasing behaviors among interpreters that are described as "horizontal violence" (Ott, 2012). As negative behaviors can create a negative call center environment this additional finding lends support for case conferencing as a strategy that reduces occupational stress and increases retention.

This research project was created, in part, to a desire to understand how case conferencing might be used to assist interpreters in managing their occupational stress. The results from this research study suggest there continues to be a limited focus from the field to build strategies to manage the occupational stress that interpreters routinely experience.

Interpreters are generally not trained to manage the occupational stress that accompanies the work of interpreting. Rather interpreters, are trained to focus on the acquisition of fluency in sign language and the process of interpreting from American Sign Language (ASL) into a spoken language. Interpreters are encouraged to immerse themselves in the Deaf Culture and to develop relationships among people who are deaf and hard of hearing. These are important considerations, but due to the constant change in this technologically laden industry, more interpreters are encountering more stress in their work with fewer tools to manage the effect of the ongoing developments.

In contrast, counselors are trained to identify and manage their emotions so that their internal stress does not interfere with their work. Self-care is a topic that is promoted at the beginning of one's graduate program and continues to be at the forefront of professional development upon graduation. Interpreters who work in the VRS setting have often received minimal training to handle the stressors that accompany their work. Often the advice from instructors and colleagues is that new interpreters need to be ready for sharp criticism of their work and would benefit from developing a "thick skin." For those interpreters who are successful at practicing self-care, they are more likely to succeed and continue to work in the field. However, for those who cannot, it can create obstacles to their retention in interpreting.

Case conferencing is a necessary tool for interpreters not only to increase their ethical capacity for making effective choices in their work but also as a way to manage the stress that they experience. There has been very little focus from the interpreting field on the stress that its practitioners experience. Even less focus has been garnered to create strategies that interpreters can use to identify and manage their stress.

The idea that case conferencing is a viable tool to decrease stress in the VRS setting is an opportunity for companies that employ VRS interpreters to embrace. When there are consistently high rates of occupational stress in a field, it is necessary to not only provide strategies for the individual practitioner but also to evaluate the system that the work occurs in. Determining the root causes of the occupational stress need to be identified, and the systemic issues need to be addressed. It is commendable that VRS companies provide professional development for their employees because ethical companies have a responsibility to provide such training and support. But as a whole, VRS companies need to do more work to address the effect company policies and procedures have for the interpreters employed by them. Case conferencing is a viable option for VRS companies to engage with their employees to address the systemic issues that accompany this work.

Additional Finding

One additional finding that was unique was the perspective that participation in case conferencing groups created a change in the center's culture where some of the participants worked. Before case conferencing was introduced to the center, participants noted that they had experienced many of the negative behaviors described by Ott as "horizontal violence" (2012). During a 4-year period, more than half of the center's interpreters participated in a case conferencing workshop. One participant stated that they were able to apply skills learned in the workshop to their work in the center, resulting in a positive change in the culture of the center. Group members described the change in the center's culture as one of professional respect and improved empathy for their colleagues. Group members described that they had become a "better peer mentor" because they were able to empathize more effectively with their colleagues who had different personalities and process the emotional content of the work differently.

Case conferencing groups seem to provide a way for interpreters to not only gain tools to decrease their occupational stress but also may be a way to create the community and connection that many interpreters may be searching. As one participant stated, “my generation is looking for community... we’re looking for connection...(Participant #2)”

Limitations

The limitations of this research are important to discuss. The case study is a small sample size. The limited population of interpreters that the participants were drawn from is a significant limitation. Participants were selected from the population of interpreters who had previously participated in case conferencing groups for VRS Interpreters that were facilitated by the researcher. All participants came from three call centers in one state who worked in one VRS company. Due to the lack of geographic diversity, the generalizability may be limited to interpreters who work in that state, in the one VRS company. The themes generated from the analysis may not necessarily apply to the population of VRS interpreters.

Other limitations of the research were the generally homogeneous demographic nature of the participants. All but one person self-identified as female, all but one as European American (White) and none identified as having a disability or being other than heterosexual. Although the vast majority (88%) of the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (RID) membership identifies as female (RID Annual Report, 2016), it would have been helpful to have at least one perspective from a male interpreter. Also, all of the participants were nationally certified by RID or by both the RID and the National Association of the Deaf (NAD). National certification has been the standard for professional interpreting in this midwestern region since its inception. It would have included more diversity in the sample if the study had been able to include the perspective of pre-certified interpreters. These interpreters may have generated additional thematic material.

The participant pool included some diversity in the age of the participants: (18-30) (1); 31-40 (2); 41-50 (4); and 51-60 (1). This case study included three age generations. According to the Pew Research Center (Dimock, 2018), the generation of Millennials are defined as being between 22-37 years of age, Generation X between the ages of 38-53 and the Boomers between 54-72. In addition to age, there was also some diversity noted in the participants' length of years of interpreting experience. The participants' work experience was clustered in three groups; 6-10 years (2), 16-20 years (3), and 21+ years (3).

The themes that were generated did correspond to each focus group and to anecdotal data that the researcher had previously gathered. It is hoped that the information will resonate with the population of VRS interpreters. Secondly, the sampling of interpreters is limited to gathering data from interpreters who work for one company within the VRS field. Future research could focus on other VRS companies to see if additional themes are noted or if the results are different. Additionally, this research is limited to interpreters who engaged in a case conferencing workshop facilitated by this author. This is a strength for the analysis as each participant received a similar experience. However, it would be valuable to see if the results are similar from research conducted on participants of other facilitated groups.

Recommendations for Future Research

Occupational stress and retention for sign language interpreters working in the field in VRS is a topic that needs more consideration by the field and more research to devise strategies to combat it. A qualitative case study design was used as it allowed for more flexibility and a depth of information to be gathered to answer the research questions. The themes from this study could be used to spawn different areas of inquiry. Subsequent studies could involve a quantitative approach that uses a quasi-experimental design to study whether case conferencing

does reduce the occupational stress of VRS interpreters. Specifically, participants could be divided into groups with some being trained in case conferencing and another acting as controls. Participants could be measured through assessments of occupational stress and burnout both before and after experiencing a series of case conferencing sessions. The results of this type of future quantitative study may then be more generalizable to the larger population of interpreters.

More research also is needed to define both the intrapsychic stressors of individual interpreters as well as the systemic stressors that when combined seem to decrease the retention of interpreters in the field. Researchers from the field of interpreting need to work in tandem with those from the counseling fields to identify what strategies might be most helpful to the interpreting practitioner.

Future research is also needed to determine the effectiveness of case conferencing regarding the end user. While the themes of application of learning and integration of practice are promising, it is not known whether the consumer who receives interpreting services would notice a difference in interpreters who practice the process of case conferencing in their work vs. those who do not. This type of question would be difficult to design a study for but in alignment with Dean and Pollard's DC-S, is an important outcome to consider.

Conclusions

Occupational stress has been reported in the literature to be more extreme for sign language interpreters working in the field of Video Relay Services (VRS) than for interpreters working in the community (Bower, 2015; Dean & Pollard, 2011; Shaw & Wessling, 2014). Even though this finding has been documented since 2010 (Dean & Pollard), very little research has been conducted that would investigate strategies that could be used by interpreters to moderate the stress they experience in VRS. This qualitative case study was designed to answer the

research questions of whether case conferencing could be used as a strategy that could reduce occupational stress and increase retention of sign language interpreters practicing in the field of VRS.

The case study recruited participants from the researcher's previous workshops who had been led in the process of case conferencing. Participants joined focus groups in which they were asked to discuss questions related to their experience of occupational stress working in VRS and what their experience had been regarding being in groups of case conferencing that were facilitated by the researcher.

Participants in this research project overwhelmingly provided support that their experience in case conferencing had assisted them in managing their stress working in VRS. Retention in the field also found support. In addition to a decrease in their occupational stress, the participants described additional themes such as an immediate application in their daily work and an integration into their overall practice of interpreting. Additional findings were that case conferencing was perceived as decreasing their co-worker's behaviors of horizontal violence in one center as it increased a feeling of community. Each participant described their experience as substantiating these themes, regardless of age. This suggests a potential widespread social validity of case conferencing among VRS interpreters.

Future practice. This qualitative case study assists in providing a proven strategy for addressing the unmet and endemic issue of increased occupational stress that interpreters practicing in the field of VRS have consistently reported for over a decade (Bower, 2015; Dean & Pollard, 2011). The results of this study should encourage the interpreting field to implement case conferencing as a standard practice. Implementation needs to include all levels of

development: Interpreter Education Programs (IEPs), Federally sponsored continuing education funding and recognition by certifying bodies.

IEPs can create more resilient interpreters by incorporating case conferencing in their curricula. IEPs routinely discuss the probability of the occupational stress that students will encounter once they graduate. By providing a strategy for managing this stress, these future interpreters will be more prepared and less apt to be sidelined when they encounter the challenging environment in VRS. It would be helpful for student interpreters to learn case conferencing in tandem with their instruction on Dean and Pollard's, Demand Control Schema (DC-S) (2011).

The Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA), that funds continuing education for sign language interpreters, needs to recognize the need for more professional development in this area of case conferencing. This researcher was trained in case conferencing in a previous cycle of funding. The current funding cycle that the RSA provides through the National Consortium of Interpreter Education Centers (NCIEC) has a new focus on meeting the gap that new graduates face between graduation from an IEP to achieving national certification. Case conferencing has been speculated to assist in reducing the time that new graduates need to learn critical thinking skills. The RSA could provide more training for facilitators of case conferencing groups and continue to promote case conferencing as a way for pre-certified interpreters to more quickly acquire the necessary skills they need to become nationally certified.

Certifying bodies such as the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (RID) need to promote and encourage case conferencing as a professional development activity. RID sponsors of Continuing Education Units (CEUs) need to recognize the diversity of cases that are brought to case conferencing. These workshops do not repeat the same information as each individual

brings a different set of ethical challenges in each case. As such, there should be a special dispensation so that CEUs can be permitted to be earned for case conferencing more than once in an interpreter's four-year CEU cycle.

Case conferencing has been found to be an effective strategy that the interpreters in this case study have been able to use to apply critical thinking skills that allow them to pair specific controls with identified challenges so that they can improve the outcomes of their calls, reduce their occupational stress and increase their retention working in VRS. Retention in VRS was found to be connected with both being able to manage the symptoms of occupational stress and job satisfaction. Themes of application and integration into practice was reported to assist in combating the tendency to become complacent in professional development due to the repetitious nature of the work in VRS. Case conferencing was also found to assist in decreasing negative behaviors that were common in a call center environment. This researcher hopes that as the influence of case conferencing grows it will also bring about a more satisfactory experience for consumers of VRS services.

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Appendix A: Informed Consent Form

Institutional Review Board Approved Form

Case Conferencing research for sign language interpreters working in the field of video relay interpreting.

Dear Colleague,

You are invited to participate in a research study for a master's level thesis about your experience as a participant in a case conferencing workshop(s) for sign language interpreters working in the field of video relay interpreting that were facilitated by Carrie L. Wilbert from 2013-2017.

Primary Investigator: Carrie L. Wilbert

Email: clwilbert@stcloudstate.edu

Phone: 651.428.0160

St. Cloud State University

720 4th Ave. South

St. Cloud, MN 56301

Faculty Advisor: Dr. Amy Hebert Knopf, Ph.D., CRC, NIC

Email: ahknopf@stcloudstate.edu

St. Cloud State University

720 4th Ave. South

St. Cloud, MN 56301

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this research study is to understand the experience of sign language interpreters who participated in case conferencing workshops for video relay interpreters that were facilitated by Carrie L. Wilbert from 2013-2017.

Study Procedures

If you agree to be part of this research study, you will be asked to participate in a 1 and ½ hour focus group. These focus groups will discuss your experience of being a participant in the workshop and any effects it may have had on your work in video relay interpreting.

These focus groups will be facilitated by Paula Gajewski Mickelson and will be audio taped. The audio tapes will be transcribed and coded for research purposes. Any information that could be used to identify you will be removed from the transcriptions.

Benefits of the research

Benefits from this study include processing what you learned about being involved with case conferencing with other sign language interpreter colleagues. You will be adding to the body of knowledge in the field of sign language interpreting. The information gleaned from the study may be helpful in advocating for change in the field of video relay interpreting.

Risks and discomforts

No risks are anticipated.

Confidentiality

Data collected will remain strictly confidential. Your name will not be disclosed, nor will you be identified if direct quotes are used. During the focus group, you do not have to answer any questions that you do not want to. All data gathered will remain strictly confidential and kept in a locked file cabinet in the office of Dr. Amy Hebert Knopf for a period of 3 years. Data will be reported and presented in aggregate (group) form or with no more than 2 identifiers coded as the focus group and participant number.

Voluntary Participation/Withdrawal

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You may decide not to participate, withdraw your participation in this study at any time, for any reason, without penalty. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with St. Cloud State University, or the researcher. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without penalty.

If you have questions about this research study, you may contact, Carrie L. Wilbert, clwilbert@stcloudstate.edu, 651-428-0160 and Dr. Amy Hebert Knopf, Ph.D., CRC, NIC ahknopf@stcloudstate.edu. Results of the study can be requested from the researcher.

Acceptance to Participate:**Case conferencing research for sign language interpreters working in the field of video relay interpreting.**

Your signature indicates that you are at least 18 years of age, you have read the information provided above, and you have consented to participate.

Signature

Date

Appendix B: Demographic Form

Case Conferencing research for sign language interpreters working in the field of video relay interpreting.

Participant Demographic Form

Please do not write your name on this form. It will be stored separately from your informed consent form and will not be linked with your responses in any way. The information you provide allows us to provide an accurate description of the sample of participants in the study.

1. Age: 18-30 _____ 31-40 _____ 41-50 _____ 51-60 _____ 61 and over _____

2. Gender: Female _____ Male _____ Transgender _____ prefer not to answer _____

3. Education: High School/GED _____ 2-year college _____ Bachelor's degree _____

Master's degree _____ Doctoral or professional degree _____

4. Are you a person with a disability? Yes _____ No _____ If yes please explain:

5. Years of paid interpreting experience:

0- 5 years _____

6-10 years _____

11-15 years _____

16-20 years _____

21+ years _____

6. Are you certified? Yes _____ No _____ If yes, what interpreting credentials do you hold?
(check all that apply)

RID: CSC, CI, CT, NIC _____

NAD: III, IV or V _____

BEI: _____ (level)

Other: (Please explain) _____

7. How do you categorize your work in Video Relay?

Full Time _____ Part Time _____

Most of my work is in VRS _____

Most of my work is in other settings _____

8. Cultural Status: (Please check all categories that best describe you)

Black/African American _____

European American _____

Hispanic/Latino/Latina American _____

Native American/Indian _____

Asian/Pacific Islander _____

Biracial/Multiracial/Multiheritage _____

Other _____ (Please Explain): _____

9. Please select the category that best describes your sexual orientation:

Lesbian _____

Bisexual _____

Gay _____

Heterosexual _____

Other: _____

Appendix C: Recruitment Email

Case Conferencing research for sign language interpreters working in the field of video relay interpreting

Potential participants will all be identified on the basis of their participation in one of the case conferencing workshops conducted by Carrie L. Wilbert from 2013-2017. All participants have worked for a video relay company in the Midwestern United States.

Contact methods

Email:

The researcher will use contact information provided previously by participants in the case conferencing workshops. Emails will be sent to individuals and a 1-week response time is requested. If not, response is given, a second email will be sent to the individual.

Email to Potential Participants

Date

Dear _____ (name of potential participant)

I am contacting you to invite you to participate in a focus group. The focus group is part of a research study for a master's level thesis that hopes to learn more about your experience as a participant in the case conferencing workshop(s) for sign language interpreters working in the field of video relay interpreting that were facilitated by Carrie L. Wilbert from 2013-2017.

Your participation is purely voluntary.

I have attached the consent form for you to read over. Could you let me know if you are interested in participating in a focus group? A yes or no response will assist me in scheduling the groups. If at all possible, please respond to this email by ____ (date). (1 week after the email is dated). I will follow up with dates, times and locations for the focus group(s).

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me!

Thank you,

Carrie Wilbert
651.428.0160
clwilbert@stcloudstate.edu

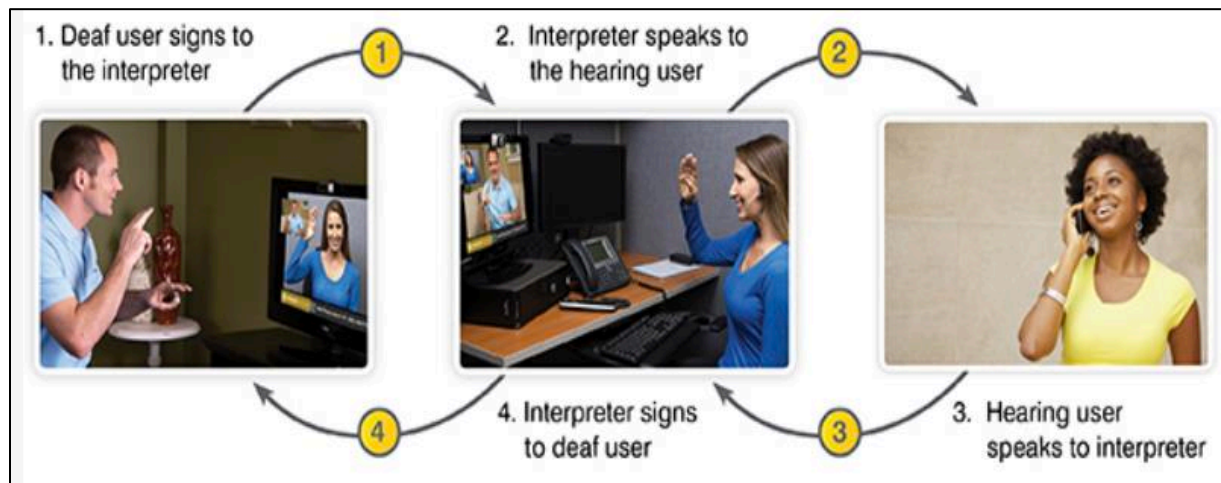
Appendix D: Demographic Information of Focus Group Participants

Participant#	Age (years)	Gender	Education	Experience (years)	Certification	VRS work		Race
1	51-60	F	Masters	21+	RID	Mostly other work		EA
2	18-30	F	Bachelors	6-10	RID	Part Time		EA
3	41-50	F	2 years	21+	RID & NAD	Mostly Other work		Other
4	31-40	F	2 years	6-10	RID	Full Time		EA
5	41-50	F	Bachelors	16-20	RID & NAD	Part Time Mostly other work		EA
6	41-50	Prefer not to answer	Masters	16-20	RID & NAD	Mostly VRS		EA
7	31-40	F	Bachelors	16-20	RID	Mostly Other		EA
8	41-50	F	2 years	21+	RID	Full Time Mostly VRS		EA

Race: EA= European American (White)

All participants identified as not having a disability and being heterosexual.

Appendix E: Video Relay Services Figure



Video Relay Service. Figure depicts how the consumer who is deaf or hard of hearing (on left) communicates with a sign language interpreter through a webcam (middle) to a person who is hearing (on right) (Photo courtesy of Sorenson Communications, 2017).

Appendix F: IRB Approval



Institutional Review Board (IRB)

720 4th Avenue South AS 210, St. Cloud, MN 56301-4498

Name: Carrie Wilbert

Email: clwilbert@stcloudstate.edu

IRB PROTOCOL DETERMINATION: Expedited Review-1

Project Title: Qualitative study for sign language interpreters working in video relay

Advisor Amy Hebert Knopf

The Institutional Review Board has reviewed your protocol to conduct research involving human subjects. Your project has been: **APPROVED**

Please note the following important information concerning IRB projects:

- The principal investigator assumes the responsibilities for the protection of participants in this project. Any adverse events must be reported to the IRB as soon as possible (ex. research related injuries, harmful outcomes, significant withdrawal of subject population, etc.).
- For expedited or full board review, the principal investigator must submit a Continuing Review/Final Report form in advance of the expiration date indicated on this letter to report conclusion of the research or request an extension.
- Exempt review only requires the submission of a Continuing Review/Final Report form in advance of the expiration date indicated in this letter if an extension of time is needed.
- Approved consent forms display the official IRB stamp which documents approval and expiration dates. If a renewal is requested and approved, new consent forms will be officially stamped and reflect the new approval and expiration dates.
- The principal investigator must seek approval for any changes to the study (ex. research design, consent process, survey/interview instruments, funding source, etc.). The IRB reserves the right to review the research at any time.

If we can be of further assistance, feel free to contact the IRB at 320-308-4932 or email ResearchNow@stcloudstate.edu and please reference the SCSU IRB number when corresponding.

IRB Chair:

Dr. Benjamin Witts
Associate Professor- Applied Behavior Analysis
Department of Community Psychology, Counseling, and Family Therapy

IRB Institutional Official:

Dr. Latha Ramakrishnan
Interim Associate Provost for Research
Dean of Graduate Studies

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SCSU IRB# 1797 - 2282

1st Year Approval Date: 3/20/2018

1st Year Expiration Date: 3/19/2019

Type: Expedited Review-1

2nd Year Approval Date:

2nd Year Expiration Date:

Today's Date: 3/21/2018

3rd Year Approval Date:

3rd Year Expiration Date: